

FACT SHEET

What is Community Interpretation? What is the Role of a Community Interpreter?

Community Interpretation is bidirectional interpreting that takes place in the course of communication among speakers of different languages. The context is the provision of public or community services delivered in settings such as government agencies, healthcare organizations, community centres, legal settings, educational institutions and social services.

Mikkelsen (1996) states that community interpreting is distinguished from other types of interpreting, such as conference or escort interpreting, in that the services are provided to the residents of the community in which the interpreting takes place, not to conference delegates, diplomats, or professionals traveling abroad to conduct business. Roberts (1994) lists another set of characteristics as follows:

- Community interpreters primarily serve to ensure access to public services, and are therefore likely to work in institutional settings;
- They are more apt to be interpreting dialogue-like interactions than speeches;
- They routinely interpret into and out of both or all of their working languages;
- A great many languages, many of them minority languages that are not the language of government in any country, are interpreted at the community level, unlike the limited number of languages of international diplomacy and commerce handled by conference and escort interpreters; and
- Community interpreters are often viewed as advocates or "cultural brokers" who go beyond the traditional neutral role of the interpreter.

Other terms have been used to describe community interpreting such as "public service interpreting", "cultural interpreting", "dialogue interpreting", "institutional interpreting", "liaison interpreting" and "ad hoc interpreting". However, cultural interpreting and community interpreting remain the most widely accepted terms in Canada. While these terms are often used interchangeably, there is a significant distinction between the two.

The role of the interpreter is to facilitate verbal communication by conveying as faithfully as possible a message between two parties who do not share a common language. ¹

The Community Interpreter:

- Follows Standards of Practice and Ethical Principles at all times².
- Accepts only those interpreting assignments that he/she is able to perform at the highest professional level.
- Participates in professional development activities whenever possible.

¹ Healthcare Interpretation Network. (2007). *National Standard Guide for Community Interpretation*. Herein "faithfully" is defined as interpretation that preserves the meaning of the message, without omissions, additions or alterations.

² Standards are part of the interpreter training curriculum and may vary from one training program to another.

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- Acquires the proper terminology and enhances his/her knowledge by creating and updating terminology files.
- Maintains and improves his/her linguistic competencies.
- Understands and conveys cultural nuances without assuming the role of advocate or cultural broker.³

For more information regarding the distinction between community interpreter and cultural interpreter go to [publishing\What is the difference between cultural interpretation and an language interpretation.pdf](#).

³ Healthcare Interpretation Network. (2007). *National Standard Guide for Community Interpretation*.

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